



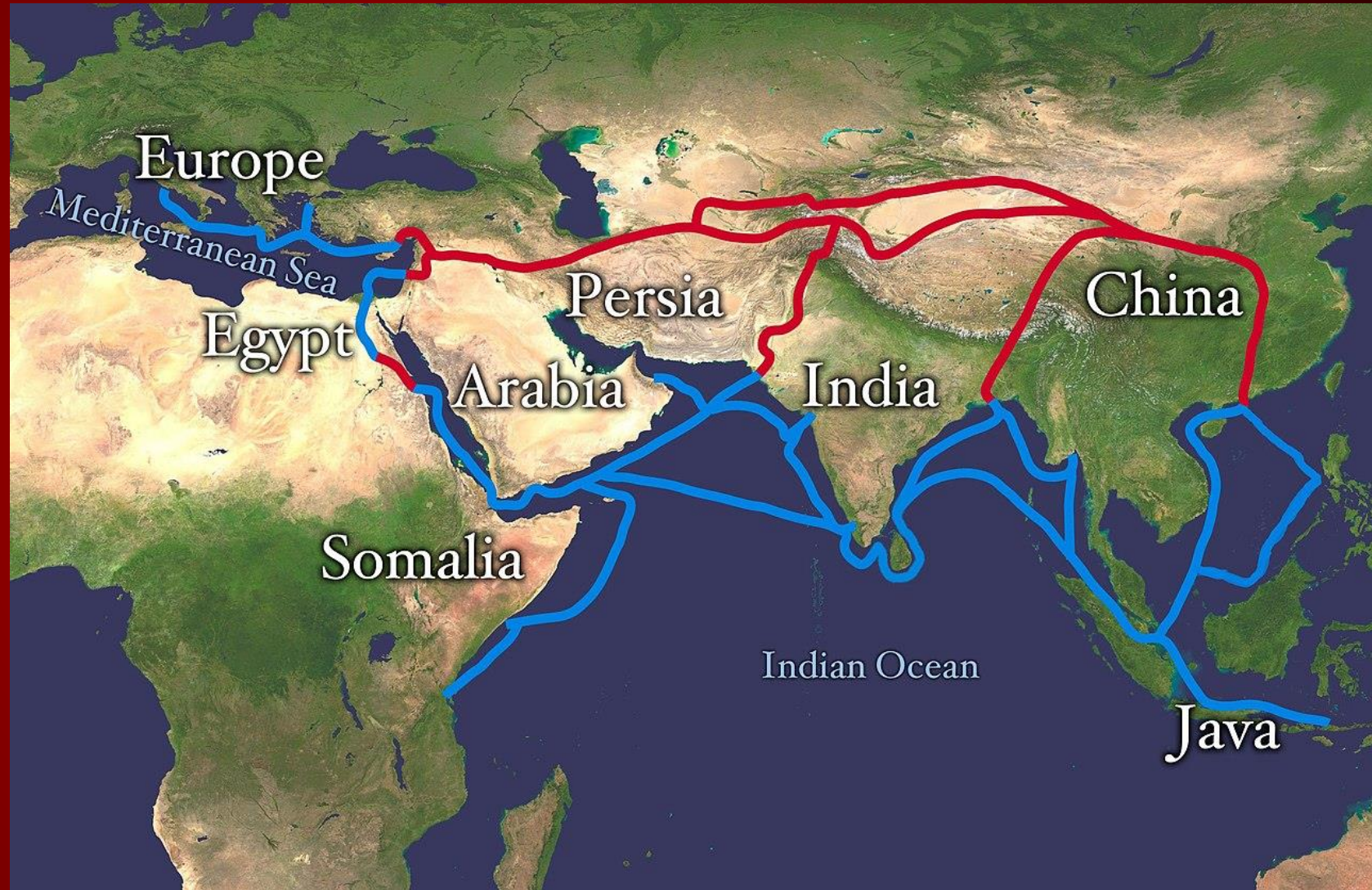
VASCO DA GAMA



VASCO DA GAMA, 1ST COUNT OF VIDIGUEIRA

c. 1460s – 24 December 1524), was a Portuguese explorer and the first European to reach India by sea.

The economically important Silk Road (red) and spice trade routes (blue) were blocked by the Seljuk Empire c. 1090, triggering the Crusades, and by the Ottoman Empire c. 1453, which spurred the Age of Discovery and European Colonialism.



THE SPICE
TRADE FROM
INDIA
ATTRACTED
THE
ATTENTION



INITIAL VOYAGE TO INDIA 1497 - 1499

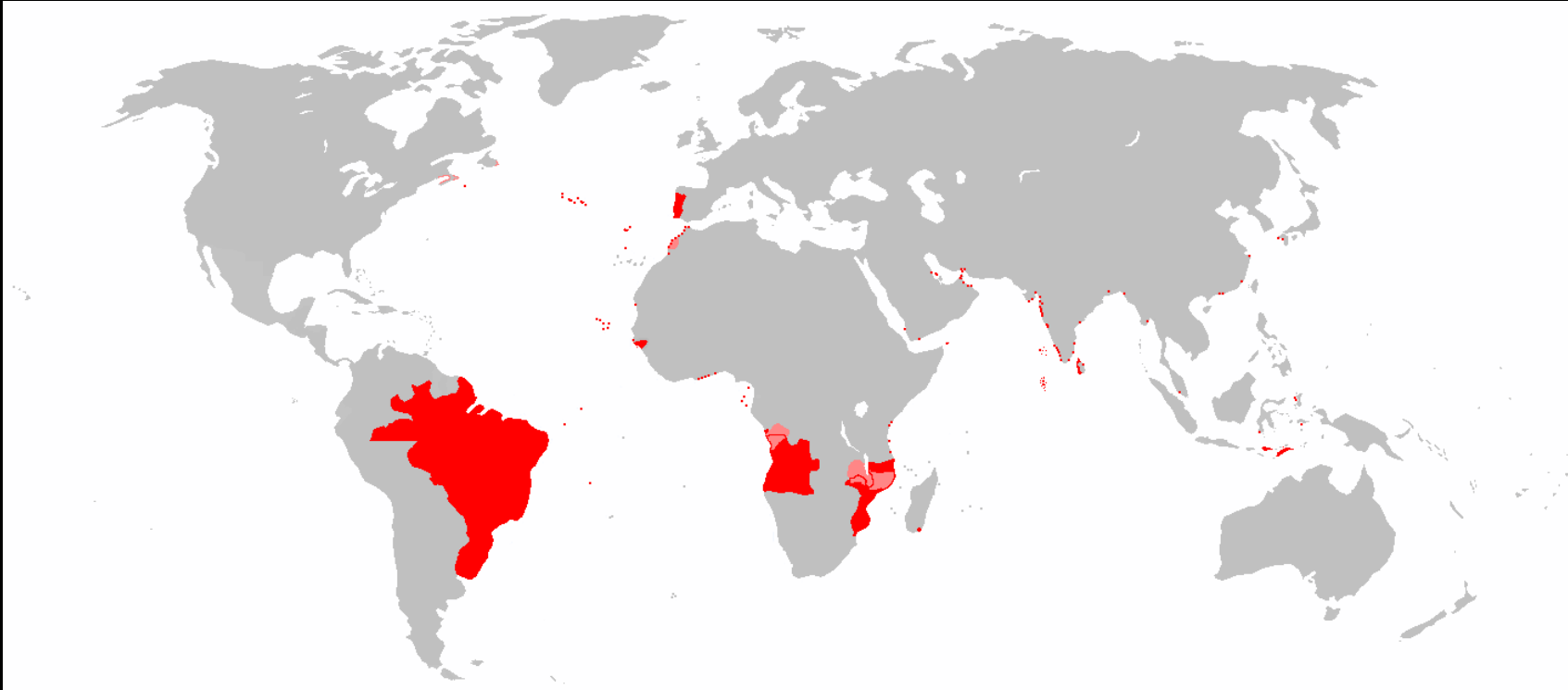
His initial voyage to India (1497–1499) was the first to link Europe and Asia by an ocean route, connecting the Atlantic and the Indian oceans and therefore, the West and the Orient. This is widely considered a milestone in world history, as it marked the beginning of a sea-based phase of global multiculturalism. Da Gama's discovery of the sea route to India opened the way for an age of global imperialism and enabled the Portuguese to establish a long-lasting colonial empire in Asia. Traveling the ocean route allowed the Portuguese to avoid sailing across the highly disputed Mediterranean and traversing the dangerous Arabian Peninsula. The sum of the distances covered in the outward and return voyages made this expedition the longest ocean voyage ever made until then, far longer than a full voyage around the world by way of the Equator. After decades of sailors trying to reach the Indies, with thousands of lives and dozens of vessels lost in shipwrecks and attacks, da Gama landed in Calicut on 20 May 1498. Unopposed access to the Indian spice routes boosted the economy of the Portuguese Empire, which was previously based along northern and coastal West Africa.

PEPPER AND CINNAMON

The main spices at first obtained from Southeast Asia were pepper and cinnamon, but soon included other products, all new to Europe. Portugal maintained a commercial monopoly of these commodities for several decades. It was not until a century later that other European powers, first the Dutch Republic and England, later France and Denmark, were able to challenge Portugal's monopoly and naval supremacy in the Cape Route.

Da Gama led two of the Portuguese India Armadas, the first and the fourth. The latter was the largest and departed for India four years after his return from the first one. For his contributions, in 1524 da Gama was appointed Governor of India, with the title of Viceroy, and was ennobled as Count of Vidigueira in 1519.

He remains a leading figure in the history of exploration, and homages worldwide have celebrated his explorations and accomplishments. The Portuguese national epic poem, *Os Lusíadas*, was written in his honour by Luís de Camões. In March 2016 thousands of artifacts and nautical remains were recovered from the wreck of the ship *Esmeralda*, one of da Gama's armada, found off the coast of Oman



**Areas of the
world that
were once part
of the
Portuguese
Empire**

BRONZE STATUE OF VASCO DA GAMA AT HIS BIRTHPLACE, SINES, PORTUGAL

Vasco da Gama was born in 1460 or 1469 in the town of Sines, one of the few seaports on the Alentejo coast, southwest Portugal, probably in a house near the church of Nossa Senhora das Salas.

Vasco da Gama's father was Estêvão da Gama, who had served in the 1460s as a knight of the household of Infante Ferdinand, Duke of Viseu. He rose in the ranks of the military Order of Santiago. Estêvão da Gama was appointed alcaide-mór (civil governor) of Sines in the 1460s, a post he held until 1478; after that he continued as a receiver of taxes and holder of the Order's commendas in the region.



Estêvão da Gama married Isabel Sodré, a daughter of João Sodré (also known as João de Resende), scion of a well-connected family of English origin. Her father and her brothers, Vicente Sodré and Brás Sodré, had links to the household of Infante Diogo, Duke of Viseu, and were prominent figures in the military Order of Christ. Vasco da Gama was the third of five sons of Estêvão da Gama and Isabel Sodré – in (probable) order of age: Paulo da Gama, João Sodré, Vasco da Gama, Pedro da Gama and Aires da Gama. Vasco also had one known sister, Teresa da Gama (who married Lopo Mendes de Vasconcelos). Little is known of da Gama's early life. The Portuguese historian Teixeira de Aragão suggests that he studied at the inland town of Évora, which is where he may have learned mathematics and navigation. It has been claimed that he studied under Abraham Zacuto, an astrologer and astronomer, but da Gama's biographer Subrahmanyam thinks this dubious. Around 1480, da Gama followed his father (rather than the Sodrés) and joined the Order of Santiago.[11] The master of Santiago was Prince John, who ascended to the throne in 1481 as King John II of Portugal.

PORTUGUESE DISCOVERIES AND EXPLORATIONS: FIRST ARRIVAL PLACES AND DATES



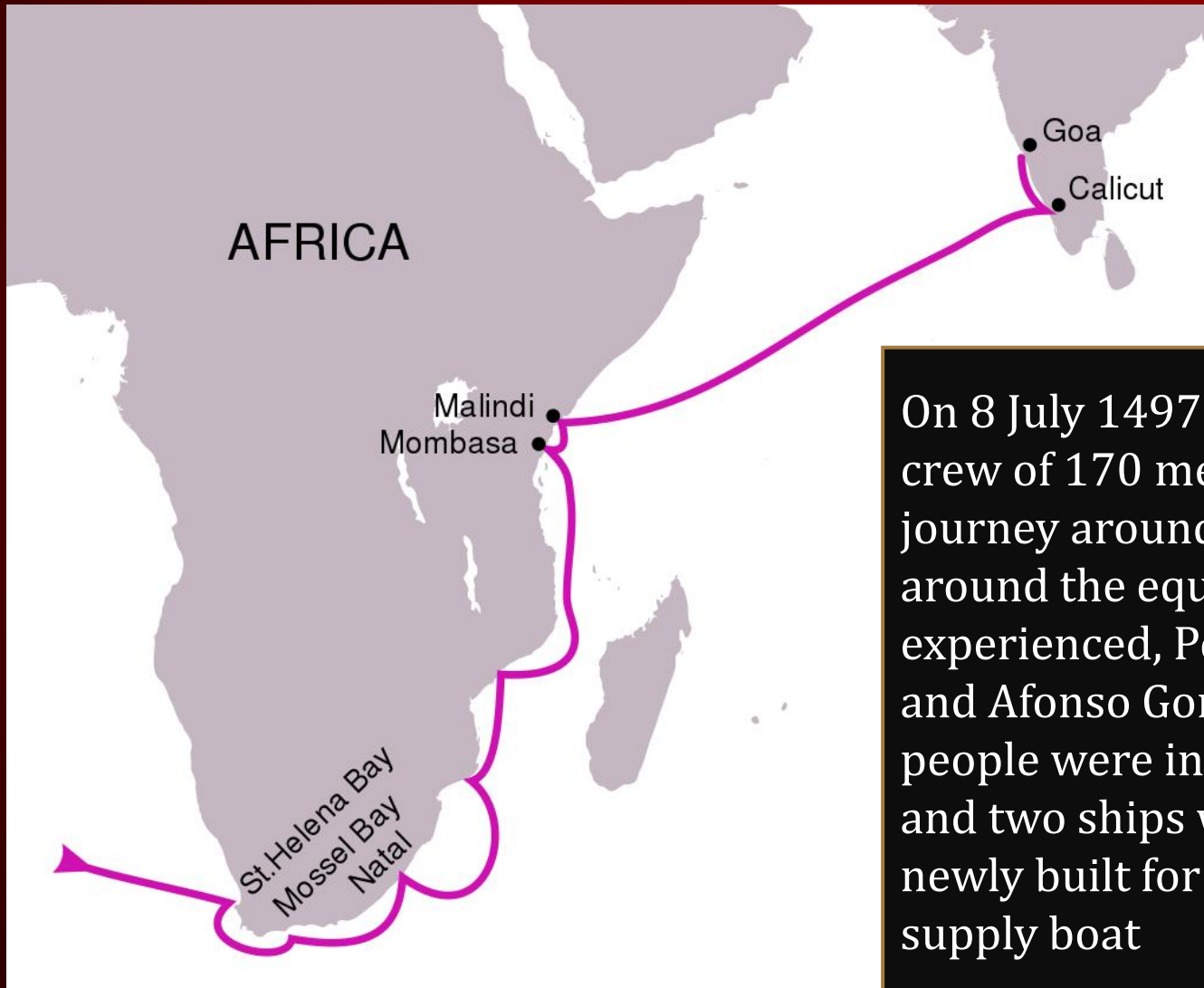
VASCO DA GAMA LEAVING THE PORT OF LISBON, PORTUGAL



From the earlier part of the 15th century, Portuguese expeditions organized by Prince Henry the Navigator had been reaching down the African coastline, principally in search of west African riches (notably, gold and slaves). They had greatly extended Portuguese maritime knowledge, but had little profit to show for the effort. After Henry's death in 1460, the Portuguese Crown showed little interest in continuing this effort and, in 1469, licensed the neglected African enterprise to a private Lisbon merchant consortium led by Fernão Gomes. Within a few years, Gomes' captains expanded Portuguese knowledge across the Gulf of Guinea, doing business in gold dust, melegueta pepper, ivory and sub-Saharan slaves. When Gomes' charter came up for renewal in 1474, Prince John (future John II), asked his father Afonso V of Portugal to pass the African charter to him. Upon becoming king in 1481, John II of Portugal set out on many long reforms. To break the monarch's dependence on the feudal nobility, John II needed to build up the royal treasury; he considered royal commerce to be the key to achieving that.

Under John II's watch, the gold and slave trade in west Africa was greatly expanded. He was eager to break into the highly profitable spice trade between Europe and Asia, which was conducted chiefly by land. At the time, this was virtually monopolized by the Republic of Venice, who operated overland routes via Levantine and Egyptian ports, through the Red Sea across to the spice markets of India. John II set a new objective for his captains: to find a sea route to Asia by sailing around the African continent. By the time Vasco da Gama was in his 20s, the king's plans were coming to fruition. In 1487, John II dispatched two spies, Pero da Covilhã and Afonso de Paiva, overland via Egypt to East Africa and India, to scout the details of the spice markets and trade routes. The breakthrough came soon after, when John II's captain Bartolomeu Dias returned from rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, having explored as far as the Fish River (Rio do Infante) in modern-day South Africa and having verified that the unknown coast stretched away to the northeast. An explorer was needed who could prove the link between the findings of Dias and those of da Covilhã and de Paiva, and connect these separate segments into a potentially lucrative trade route across the Indian Ocean.

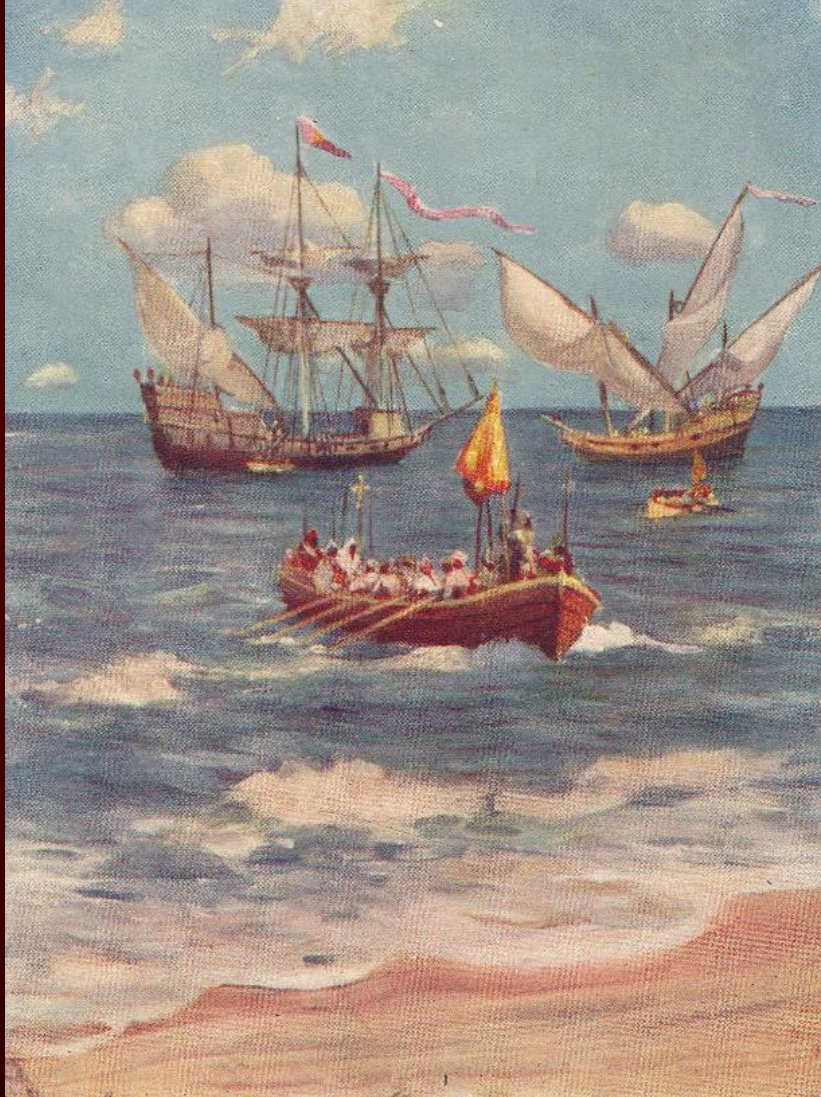
FIRST VOYAGE



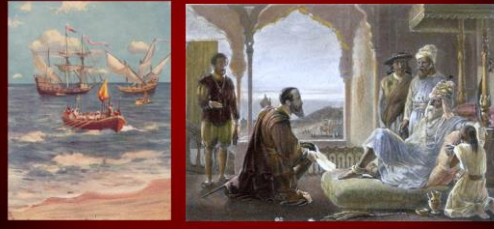
The route followed in Vasco da Gama's first voyage (1497–1499)

On 8 July 1497 Vasco da Gama led a fleet of four ships with a crew of 170 men from Lisbon. The distance traveled in the journey around Africa to India and back was greater than around the equator. The navigators included Portugal's most experienced, Pero de Alenquer, Pedro Escobar, João de Coimbra, and Afonso Gonçalves. It is not known for certain how many people were in each ship's crew but approximately 55 returned, and two ships were lost. Two of the vessels were carracks, newly built for the voyage; the others were a caravel and a supply boat

JOURNEY TO THE CAPE



JOURNEY TO THE CAPE



The expedition set sail from Lisbon on 8 July 1497. It followed the route pioneered by earlier explorers along the coast of Africa via Tenerife and the Cape Verde Islands. After reaching the coast of present-day Sierra Leone, da Gama took a course south into the open ocean, crossing the Equator and seeking the South Atlantic westerlies that Bartolomeu Dias had discovered in 1487. This course proved successful and on 4 November 1497, the expedition made landfall on the African coast. For over three months the ships had sailed more than 10,000 kilometres (6,000 mi) of open ocean, by far the longest journey out of sight of land made by that time.

By 16 December, the fleet had passed the Great Fish River (Eastern Cape, South Africa) – where Dias had anchored – and sailed into waters previously unknown to Europeans. With Christmas pending, da Gama and his crew gave the coast they were passing the name Natal, which carried the connotation of "birth of Christ" in Portuguese.

MOZAMBIQUE

Vasco da Gama spent 2 to 29 March 1498 in the vicinity of Mozambique Island. Arab-controlled territory on the East African coast was an integral part of the network of trade in the Indian Ocean. Fearing the local population would be hostile to Christians, da Gama impersonated a Muslim and gained audience with the Sultan of Mozambique. With the paltry trade goods he had to offer, the explorer was unable to provide a suitable gift to the ruler. Soon the local populace became suspicious of da Gama and his men. Forced by a hostile crowd to flee Mozambique, da Gama departed the harbor, firing his cannons into the city in retaliation

Mombasa

In the vicinity of modern Kenya, the expedition resorted to piracy, looting Arab merchant ships that were generally unarmed trading vessels without heavy cannons. The Portuguese became the first known Europeans to visit the port of Mombasa from 7 to 13 April 1498, but were met with hostility and soon departed.

MALINDI

Vasco da Gama continued north, arriving on 14 April 1498 at the friendlier port of Malindi, whose leaders were having a conflict with those of Mombasa. There the expedition first noted evidence of Indian traders. Da Gama and his crew contracted the services of a pilot who used his knowledge of the monsoon winds to guide the expedition the rest of the way to Calicut, located on the southwest coast of India. Sources differ over the identity of the pilot, calling him variously a Christian, a Muslim, and a Gujarati. One traditional story describes the pilot as the famous Arab navigator Ibn Majid, but other contemporaneous accounts place Majid elsewhere, and he could not have been near the vicinity at the time. None of the Portuguese historians of the time mentions Ibn Majid. Vasco da Gama left Malindi for India on 24 April 1498.

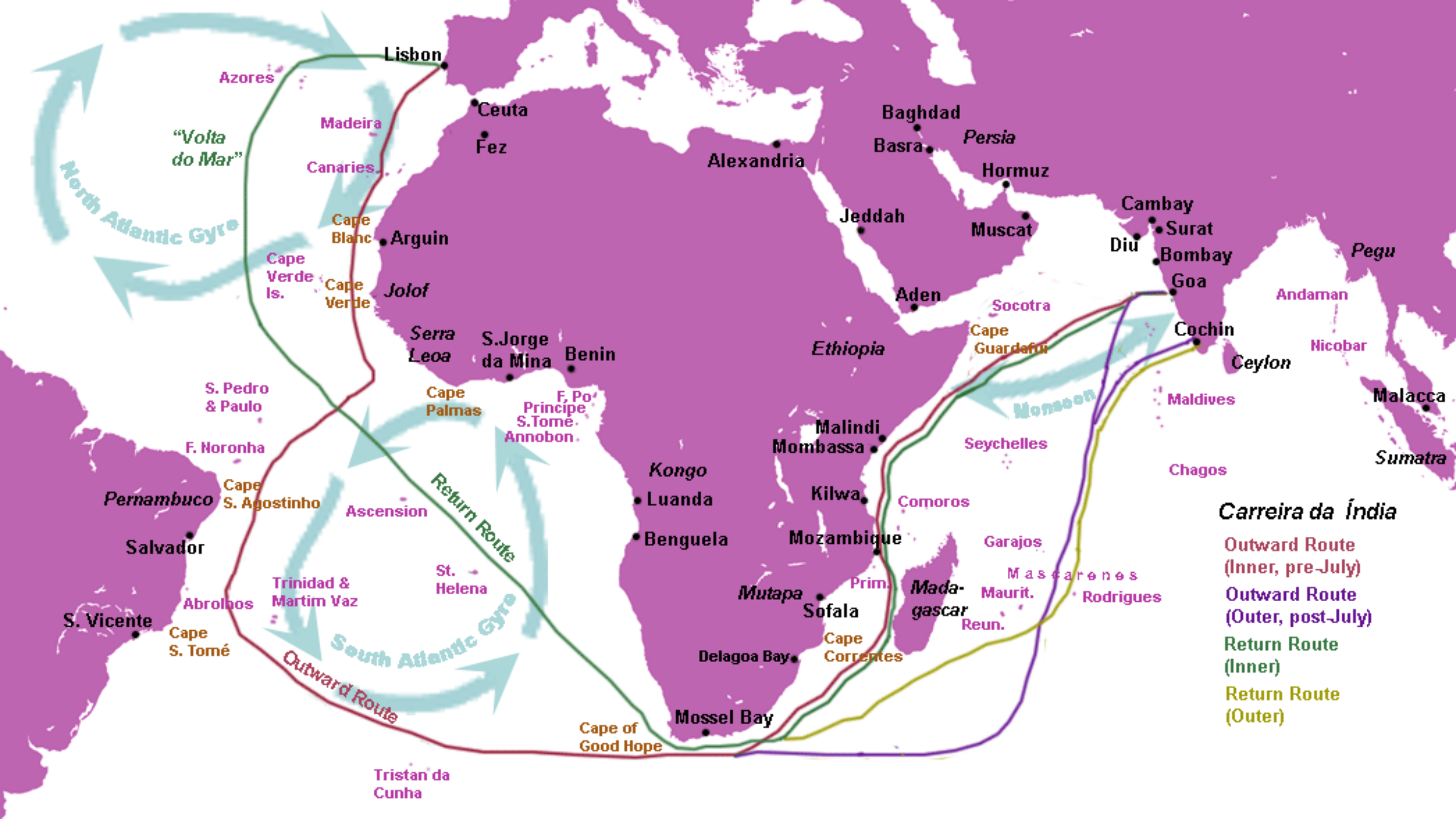
CALICUT, INDIA

The fleet arrived in Kappadu near Kozhikode (Calicut), in Malabar Coast (present day Kerala state of India), on 20 May 1498. The King of Calicut, the Samudiri (Zamorin), who was at that time staying in his second capital at Ponnani, returned to Calicut on hearing the news of the foreign fleet's arrival. The navigator was received with traditional hospitality, including a grand procession of at least 3,000 armed Nairs, but an interview with the Zamorin failed to produce any concrete results. When local authorities asked da Gama's fleet, "What brought you hither?", they replied that they had come "in search of Christians and spices." The presents that da Gama sent to the Zamorin as gifts from Dom Manuel – four cloaks of scarlet cloth, six hats, four branches of corals, twelve almasares, a box with seven brass vessels, a chest of sugar, two barrels of oil and a cask of honey – were trivial, and failed to impress. While Zamorin's officials wondered at why there was no gold or silver, the Muslim merchants who considered da Gama their rival suggested that the latter was only an ordinary pirate and not a royal ambassador.

Vasco da Gama's request for permission to leave a factor behind him in charge of the merchandise he could not sell was turned down by the King, who insisted that da Gama pay customs duty – preferably in gold – like any other trader, which strained the relation between the two. Annoyed by this, da Gama carried a few Nairs and sixteen fishermen (mukkuva) off with him by force. Vasco da Gama left Calicut on 29 August 1498. Eager to set sail for home, he ignored the local knowledge of monsoon wind patterns that were still blowing onshore. The fleet initially inched north along the Indian coast, and then anchored in at Anjediva island for a spell. They finally struck out for their Indian Ocean crossing on 3 October 1498. But with the winter monsoon yet to set in, it was a harrowing journey. On the outgoing journey, sailing with the summer monsoon wind, da Gama's fleet crossed the Indian Ocean in only 23 days; now, on the return trip, sailing against the wind, it took 132 days. The fleet did not make a stop, but passing before Mogadishu, the anonymous diarist of the expedition noted that it was a large city with houses of four or five storeys high and big palaces in its center and many mosques with cylindrical minarets

Da Gama's fleet finally arrived in Malindi on 7 January 1499, in a terrible state – approximately half of the crew had died during the crossing, and many of the rest were afflicted with scurvy. Not having enough crewmen left standing to manage three ships, da Gama ordered the São Rafael scuttled off the East African coast, and the crew re-distributed to the remaining two ships, the São Gabriel and the Berrio. Thereafter, the sailing was smoother. By early March, they had arrived in Mossel Bay, and crossed the Cape of Good Hope in the opposite direction on 20 March, reaching the west African coast by 25 April.

The diary record of the expedition ends abruptly here. Reconstructing from other sources, it seems they continued to Cape Verde, where Nicolau Coelho's Berrio separated from Vasco da Gama's São Gabriel and sailed on by itself. The Berrio arrived in Lisbon on 10 July 1499 and Nicolau Coelho personally delivered the news to King Manuel I and the royal court, then assembled in Sintra. In the meantime, back in Cape Verde, da Gama's brother, Paulo da Gama, had fallen grievously ill.



The spice trade would prove to be a major asset to the Portuguese royal treasury, and other consequences soon followed. For example, da Gama's voyage had made it clear that the east coast of Africa, the Contra Costa, was essential to Portuguese interests; its ports provided fresh water, provisions, timber, and harbors for repairs, and served as a refuge where ships could wait out unfavorable weather. One significant result was the colonization of Mozambique by the Portuguese Crown.

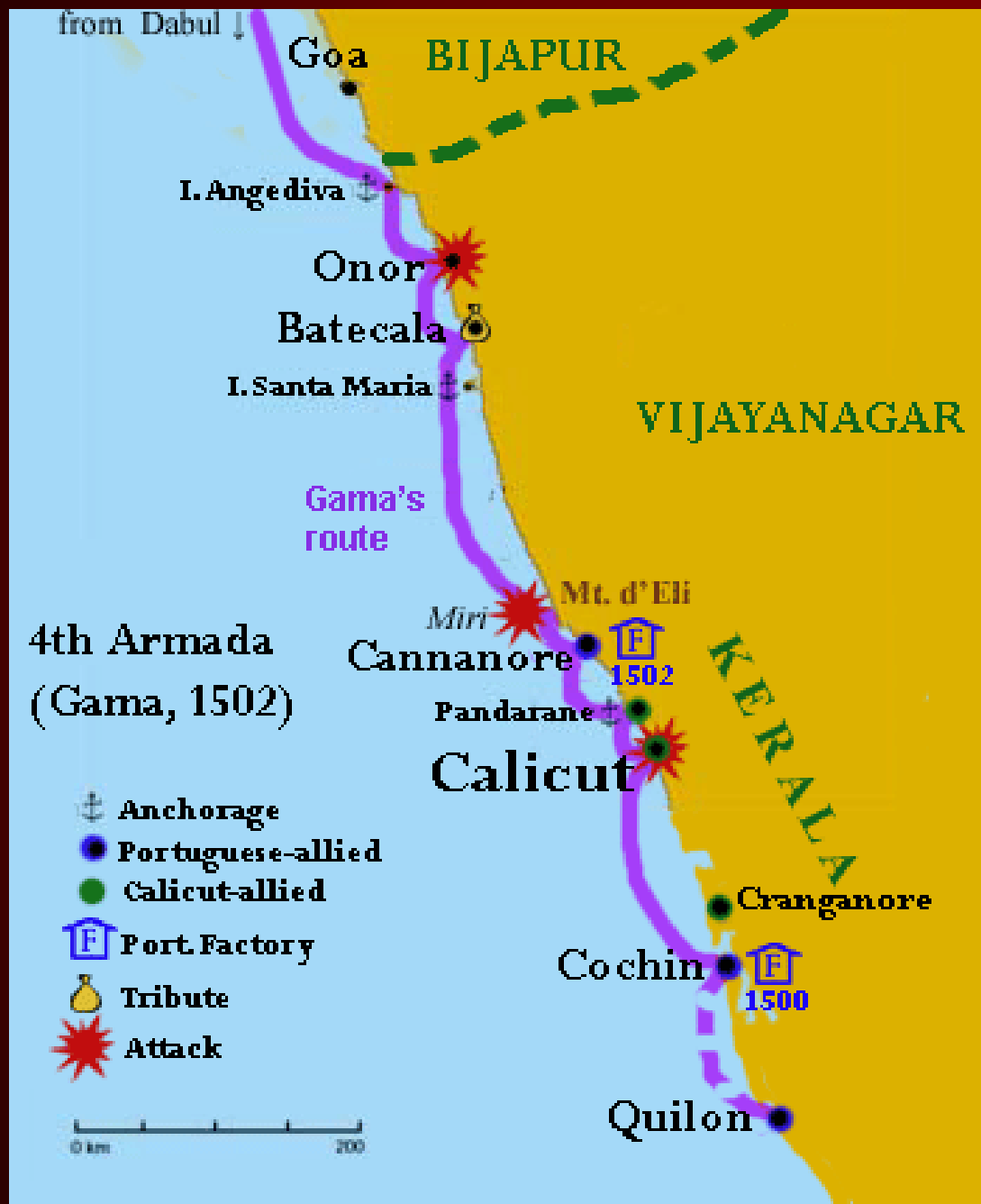
In December 1499, King Manuel I of Portugal rewarded Vasco da Gama with the town of Sines as a hereditary fief (the town his father, Estêvão, had once held as a commenda). This turned out to be a complicated affair, for Sines still belonged to the Order of Santiago. The master of the Order, Jorge de Lencastre, might have endorsed the reward – after all, da Gama was a Santiago knight, one of their own, and a close associate of Lencastre himself. But the fact that Sines was awarded by the king provoked Lencastre to refuse out of principle, lest it encourage the king to make other donations of the Order's properties. Da Gama would spend the next few years attempting to take hold of Sines, an effort that would estrange him from Lencastre and eventually prompt da Gama to abandon his beloved Order of Santiago, switching over to the rival Order of Christ in 1507.

In the meantime, da Gama made do with a substantial hereditary royal pension of 300,000 reis. He was awarded the noble title of Dom (lord) in perpetuity for himself, his siblings and their descendants. On 30 January 1502, da Gama was awarded the title of Almirante dos mares de Arabia, Persia, India e de todo o Oriente ("Admiral of the Seas of Arabia, Persia, India and all the Orient") – an overwrought title reminiscent of the ornate Castilian title borne by Christopher Columbus (evidently, Manuel must have reckoned that if Castile had an 'Admiral of the Ocean Seas', then surely Portugal should have one too). Another royal letter, dated October 1501, gave da Gama the personal right to intervene and exercise a determining role on any future India-bound fleet.

Around 1501, Vasco da Gama married Catarina de Ataíde, daughter of Álvaro de Ataíde, the alcaide-mór of Alvor (Algarve), and a prominent nobleman connected by kinship with the powerful Almeida family (Catarina was a first cousin of D. Francisco de Almeida).

The follow-up expedition, the Second India Armada, launched in 1500 under the command of Pedro Álvares Cabral with the mission of making a treaty with the Zamorin of Calicut and setting up a Portuguese factory in the city. However, Pedro Cabral entered into a conflict with the local Arab merchant guilds, with the result that the Portuguese factory was overrun in a riot and up to 70 Portuguese were killed. Cabral blamed the Zamorin for the incident and bombarded the city. Thus war broke out between Portugal and Calicut.

Vasco da Gama invoked his royal letter to take command of the 4th India Armada, scheduled to set out in 1502, with the explicit aim of taking revenge upon the Zamorin and force him to submit to Portuguese terms. The heavily armed fleet of fifteen ships and eight hundred men left Lisbon on 12 February 1502. It was followed in April by another squadron of five ships led by his cousin, Estêvão da Gama (the son of Aires da Gama), which caught up to them in the Indian Ocean. The 4th Armada was a veritable da Gama family affair.



Malabar Coast of India, c. 1500, showing the path of Vasco da Gama's 4th India Armada in 1502

The violent treatment meted out by da Gama quickly brought trade along the Malabar Coast of India, upon which Calicut depended, to a standstill. But the Zamorin nonetheless refused to submit to Portuguese terms, and even ventured to hire a fleet of strong warships to challenge da Gama's armada (which da Gama managed to defeat in a naval battle before Calicut harbor). Da Gama loaded up with spices at Cochin and Cannanore, small nearby kingdoms, half-vassal and half-at-war with the Zamorin, whose alliances had been secured by prior Portuguese fleets. The 4th armada left India in early 1503. Da Gama left behind a small squadron of caravels under the command of his uncle, Vicente Sodré, to patrol the Indian coast, to continue harassing Calicut shipping, and to protect the Portuguese factories at Cochin and Cannanore from the Zamorin's inevitable reprisals. Vasco da Gama arrived back in Portugal in September 1503, effectively having failed in his mission to bring the Zamorin to submission. This failure, and the subsequent more galling failure of his uncle Vicente Sodré to protect the Portuguese factory in Cochin, probably counted against any further rewards. When the Portuguese king Manuel I of Portugal decided to appoint the first governor and viceroy of Portuguese India in 1505, da Gama was conspicuously overlooked, and the post given to Francisco de Almeida.

On his second voyage, Vasco da Gama inflicted acts of cruelty upon competing traders and local inhabitants, which sealed his notoriety in India. During his second voyage to Calicut, da Gama intercepted a ship of Muslim pilgrims at Madayi travelling from Calicut to Mecca. Described in detail by eyewitness Thomé Lopes and chronicler Gaspar Correia, da Gama looted the ship with over 400 pilgrims on board including 50 women, locked in the passengers, the owner and an ambassador from Egypt and burned them to death. They offered their wealth, which "could ransom all the Christian slaves in the Kingdom of Fez and much more" but were not spared. Da Gama looked on through the porthole and saw the women bringing up their gold and jewels and holding up their babies to beg for mercy.

**AN AGED VASCO DA GAMA, AS VICEROY
OF INDIA AND COUNT OF VIDIGUEIRA
(FROM LIVRO DE LISUARTE DE ABREU)**



Interlude

For the next two decades, Vasco da Gama lived out a quiet life, unwelcome in the royal court and sidelined from Indian affairs. His attempts to return to the favor of Manuel I (including switching over to the Order of Christ in 1507), yielded little. Almeida, the larger-than-life Afonso de Albuquerque and, later on, Albergaria and Sequeira, were the king's preferred point men for India.

After Ferdinand Magellan defected to the Crown of Castile in 1518, Vasco da Gama threatened to do the same, prompting the king to undertake steps to retain him in Portugal and avoid the embarrassment of losing his own "Admiral of the Indies" to Spain. In 1519, after years of ignoring his petitions, King Manuel I finally hurried to give Vasco da Gama a feudal title, appointing him the first Count of Vidigueira, a count title created by a royal decree issued in Évora on 29 December, after a complicated agreement with Dom Jaime, Duke of Braganza, who ceded him on payment the towns of Vidigueira and Vila dos Frades. The decree granted Vasco da Gama and his heirs all the revenues and privileges related, thus establishing da Gama as the first Portuguese count who was not born with royal blood.

Third voyage and death

After the death of King Manuel I in late 1521, his son and successor, King John III of Portugal set about reviewing the Portuguese government overseas. Turning away from the old Albuquerque clique (now represented by Diogo Lopes de Sequeira), John III looked for a fresh start. Vasco da Gama re-emerged from his political wilderness as an important adviser to the new king's appointments and strategy. Seeing the new Spanish threat to the Maluku Islands as the priority, Vasco da Gama advised against the obsession with Arabia that had pervaded much of the Manueline period, and continued to be the dominant concern of Duarte de Menezes, then-governor of Portuguese India. Menezes also turned out to be incompetent and corrupt, subject to numerous complaints. As a result, John III decided to appoint Vasco da Gama himself to replace Menezes, confident that the magic of his name and memory of his deeds might better impress his authority on Portuguese India, and manage the transition to a new government and new strategy. Gama contracted malaria not long after arriving, and died in the city of Cochin on Christmas Eve in 1524, three months after his arrival.